DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 672 CG 015 290

AUTHOR Shaffer, David R.; Graziano, William G.
TITLE Effects of Positive and Negative Moods on Helping Tasks Having Pleasant or Unpleasant Consequences.
PUB DATE Mar 81
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (27th, Atlanta, GA, March 25-28, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; *Altruism; Cooperation; Emotional Response; *Helping Relationship; *Prosocial Behavior; *Psychological Patterns; Social Attitudes; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Hedonism; *Moods

ABSTRACT

Research on altruism has found that persons experiencing either positive or negative moods are often more altruistically inclined than their counterparts experiencing neutral affective states. Prosocial behavior may become self-gratifying and altruism may be a form of hedonism. A field study investigated the effects of positive and negative moods on individuals' willingness to help. Subjects (N=72), who had experienced a mood induction procedure designed to place them in a positive, neutral, or negative mood, were approached by an individual who requested their assistance on a task with pleasant or unpleasant consequences. Results indicated that procedures designed to induce either positive or negative moods facilitated helping when the task had pleasant consequences, but tended to inhibit helping when the task was likely to be unpleasant. The findings were consistent with the theory that many everyday acts of altruism are interpretable as a form of hedonism. (Author/HRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED204672

EFFECTS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE MOODS ON HELPING TASKS HAVING PLEASANT OR UNPLEASANT CONSEQUENCES

David R. Shaffer
William G. Graziano

University of Georgia

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

David R. Shaffer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CG 015290

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Atlanta, GA, March 25-28, 1981.

Effects of Positive and Negative Moods on Helping Tasks

Having Pleasant or Unpleasant Consequences

One of the more interesting phenomena to emerge from the altruism literature of the past decade is the finding that people experiencing either positive or negative moods are often more altruistically inclined than their counterparts experiencing neutral affective states (e.g., Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; Isen, 1970, Isen & Simmonds, 1978). Perhaps the most basic assumption made by those theorists who have proposed explanations for mood-induced increases in altruism is that acts of kindness which appear to be self-sacrificial are actually self-reinforcing. Prominent social learning theorists (cf. Aronfreed, 1970) lend credence to this position noting that children are often reinforced for prosocial acts (and/or punished for failing to help others) during the course of their socialization, and should eventually associate such behavior with positive outcomes. In other words, acts of kindness are said to become conditioned (i.e., secondary) reinforcers.

If one can assume that prosocial behavior has become self-gratifying for most adult subjects, an explanation for mood-induced increases in altruism falls into place. Consider first the individual who is feeling good and who presumably would like to prolong this pleasant affect. According to the mood maintenance hypothesis proposed by Alice Isen and her associates (e.g., Isen & Simmonds, 1978), people experiencing positive moods should be very willing to help others. In so doing, they have an opportunity to provide themselves with conditioned reinforcement which, in turn, helps to maintain their pleasant moods (and/or to avoid the unpleasant affect they might otherwise experience should they fail to help).

Now consider the individual who is feeling "down" or depressed and who, presumably, would like to alter his or her spirits for the better. According to the negative state relief hypothesis (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976), people experiencing negative moods should also be eager to assist others. By offering assistance, a gloomy individual can provide him/herself with conditioned reinforcers that help to alleviate a bad mood. Note that the mood maintenance and negative state relief hypotheses are not at all contradictory. Each applies to a distinct affective domain (i.e., positive vs. negative moods), and each stems from a more general proposition that altruism is a form of hedonism--a class of behavior that is more selfish than selfless (Cialdini et al., 1973).

A recent study by Isen and Simmonds (1978) provides some support for both the mood maintenance hypothesis and the proposition on which it rests, namely that altruism is a form of hedonism. Subjects were shoppers using public telephones in an enclosed shopping mall. Half of the callers found a dime in the telephone coin return, an outcome which was said to place them in a good mood. The remaining callers, who found no dime, were thought to be in a more neutral mood. As the subject left the phone booth, he or she was approached by an experimenter who explained that he was conducting research on mood states. The subject was then asked to read some prepared mood statements ostensibly to determine if these statements really would affect a person's mood. Half of the subjects were asked to read positive mood statements, a task which should have induced positive affect and been particularly reinforcing to "good mood" subjects who presumably were motivated to maintain their pleasant feelings. The remaining subjects were asked to read negative mood statements, a task that induces negative affect (Aderman, 1972) and thus, should have been rather unrewarding to "good mood" subjects whose pleasant feelings could be undermined. The number of statements subjects chose to read and the

amount of time spent reading the statements served as measures of prosocial behavior.

The results were clearly consistant with the mood maintenance hypothesis. When asked to read positive mood statements, subjects experiencing positive moods were more helpful on both prosocial indexes than were subjects experiencing neutral moods. In contrast, subjects experiencing positive moods were less helpful than those experiencing neutral moods if asked to read negative mood statements. Thus, the Isen and Simmonds (1978) experiment suggests that good moods facilitate helping behavior only if the help called for is likely to reinforce the benefactor by maintaining his/her pleasant affect.

If the "altruism-as-hedonism" analysis has any merit, one should not only be able to replicate the Isen and Simmonds (1978) results, but also demonstrate that negative moods have similar effects. Clearly, the negative state relief hypothesis implies that people experiencing negative moods should be quite willing to engage in pleasant or rewarding prosocial activities that promise to alleviate their unpleasant feelings. On the other hand, the "gloomy gus" should be especially reluctant to offer assistance to others if the help needed or requested is clearly unpleasant or unrewarding and thus, offers little promise of alleviating an unpleasant mood.

The present field experiment was intended as a conceptual replication and extension of the Isen and Simmonds (1978) study. Subjects first underwent a mood induction designed to place them in a positive, neutral, or negative mood. They were then approached by an individual who requested their assistance on a task that was likely to have pleasant or unpleasant consequences. The predictions based on the premise that altruism is a form of hedonism were that preexisting positive or negative moods will facilitate helping when the

prosocial act is likely to be pleasant, but will inhibit helping when the consequences of the requested assistance are thought to be unpleasant.

Method

Subjects and Design

Subjects were 72 adults who were seated alone at various outdoor locales on the campus of a large southeastern university during the summer quarter of 1980. Each subject was exposed to an operation that was designed to induce a positive, a neutral, or a negative mood. Shortly thereafter, the subject was approached by an individual who asked him or her to undertake a task that would likely produce pleasant or unpleasant consequences. Thus, the design was a 3 (Induced mood--positive, neutral, or negative) x 2 (Type of helping--pleasant or unpleasant consequences) factorial.

Mood Induction

The mood induction was accomplished by exposing subjects to one of three "overheard" conversations between two experimental confederates. The positive mood conversation was a short chat in which one young female joyfully told another that her childless aunt and uncle, who had been trying for years to adopt a child, had finally overcome all obstacles and had recently adopted a baby. In the neutral mood conversation, one female told another in a matter-of-fact tone that her childless aunt and uncle were currently weighing the pros and cons of adoption and would soon make a decision whether or not to adopt a child. Finally, the negative mood conversation portrayed a very unhappy female who painfully recounted to a friend that her childless aunt and uncle had been turned down on the basis of their age when they attempted to adopt a child. Each of the three conversations was approximately 30 seconds in length.

Pretest data. Before any experimental data were collected, the mood inducing conversations were tape-recorded (along with 12 other conversations)

by members of our research team, and subsequently played to four classes of undergraduate psychology students. Students were asked to listen to each conversation and then rate how it made them feel on four mood adjective dimensions: sad, light-hearted, elated, and depressed. Each mood adjective rating was made on a 7-point bipolar scale labeled at the endpoints (i.e., 1 = not at all; 7 = most definitely). The summed ratings for the two negative mood adjectives were then subtracted from the summed ratings for the two positive mood adjectives, thus producing rating scores for a conversation that could vary from -12 (induced much negative affect) to +12 (induced much positive affect). Differences in the mean ratings of the positive mood (+8.29), neutral mood (+.64) and negative mood (-6.62) conversations were in the anticipated direction and highly significant, $F(1, 123) = 239.92$, $p < .001$.

Procedure

The procedure began as two female confederates, who were standing or seated within 8-10 feet of the subject, ran through one of the three conversations designed to induce a positive, neutral, or negative mood. Approximately 60 seconds after the confederates had completed their chat and wandered off, a female experimenter, who was "blind" as to the subject's induced mood, walked up and greeted him or her. The experimenter identified herself and explained that she was conducting research on moods. She then pointed to a book of mood statements which she carried and said either that the statements were designed to put people in a good mood or to put people in a bad mood. The experimenter then explained that she needed to get people's opinions as to whether these statements really would affect their moods, adding that so far, people who had read them said that "reading the statements really had put them in a good (bad) mood." Thus, subjects had advance knowledge that their assistance would likely produce pleasant or unpleasant consequences. If the subject agreed to help when subsequently

asked to read mood statements, the experimenter told him or her to read aloud only as many items as was necessary to determine whether these statements would affect his or her mood. The booklet containing the appropriate Velten Mood Statements (Velten, 1968; Aderman, 1972) was then opened, and the subject began reading the statements into a small cassette recorder.

Three dependent measures were recorded for each subject: (1) willingness to read mood statements, (2) the number of statements read, and (3) time spent reading statements. The experimenter, who knew whether the subject was reading positive or negative statements without knowing the subject's induced mood, recorded the number of statements read (a check on each of these entries was made after the experimental session by simply replaying the cassette recording). A third confederate, who had no knowledge as to the subject's induced mood or the type of statements the subject was reading, was positioned approximately 50 feet away. Using a stopwatch, this individual measured the time spent by each subject in reading the statements. In sum, care was taken to insure that neither data recorder had sufficient knowledge of a given subject's experimental condition to impose a systematic bias on the recording of the data.

When the subject returned the book of mood statements to the experimenter, he (she) was provided an explanation of the purpose of the experiment and thanked for participating.

Results and Discussion

The percentage of subjects in each condition who agreed to read mood statements as well as the condition means for "number of statements read" and "time spent reading" appear in Table 1. Clearly, the "percentages" data

---

Insert Table 1 about here

---

provide little support for the experimental hypotheses, as there are no differences, across conditions, in the percentage of subjects who agreed to assist the experimenter, $\chi^2 < 1$. However the "percentage of subjects helping" index may provide a rather insensitive test of the hypotheses if it is reasonable to argue that college students are generally willing to donate some time to a peer who is trying to complete an academic project.

An examination of the condition means for the two quantitative measures of helping suggests that the amount of help one provides depends, in part, on his or her mood and the kind of assistance that is requested. Recall the predictions derived from the contention that altruism is a form of hedonism. Succinctly stated, they are that moods will facilitate helping when the prosocial act is likely to have positive consequences, but will inhibit helping when the act in question is thought to be unpleasant. These predictions were evaluated through a set of a priori planned comparisons conducted within the context of 3 (Induced mood) x 2 (Type of helping) ANOVAs performed on each of the quantitative measures of helping. Scores on the quantitative indexes were transformed (log transformation) for the analyses because the condition variances were unequal.[1]

The first set of planned comparisons tested the hypothesis that subjects experiencing either positive or negative moods would be more helpful than subjects in the neutral mood condition if asked to read good mood statements. This prediction was supported, as the planned comparison for each quantitative index is significant (i.e., for number of statements read, $F(1, 66) = 6.14$, $p < .025$; for time spent reading, $F(1, 66) = 4.15$, $p < .025$).[2] The second set of planned comparisons tested the hypothesis that subjects experiencing either positive or negative moods would be less helpful than those experiencing neutral moods if asked to read negative mood statements. Although the means were patterned as expected for both prosocial

indexes, only the planned comparison for the "number of statements" index is significant, $F(1, 66) = 2.79$, $p = .05$ (for time spent reading, $F(1, 66) = 1.28$, n.s.).

In sum, the data are generally consistent with the predictions derived from the premise that altruism is a form of hedonism. That is, moods are associated with increases in the amount of help given if the requested assistance is likely to have positive consequences. Moreover, there is a clear tendency for moods to inhibit the expression of a prosocial act that could have negative consequences for the benefactor.

Recently, Bateson, Coke, Chard, Smith, and Taliaferro (1979) have proposed an "activation" hypothesis to explain the facilitative impact of good moods on helping, or on any other class of social behavior that is likely to have positive consequences for the person performing such acts. Briefly, the activation model implies that an elevation in mood functions as a form of arousal that energizes or increases the incidence of behaviors that have a positive valence for the individual. Since most helping acts are likely to have a positive valence, good moods should generally lead to increases in helping behavior.

Our findings for the positively valenced helping act (i.e., reading good mood statements) are not only consistent with the above activation model, but further indicate that bad moods may also have such an activating effect on a positively toned prosocial response. Furthermore, the findings for the negatively valenced helping act suggest yet another extension of the basic activation model: either good or bad moods may have an inhibiting effect on a prosocial response that is likely to have negative consequences for the actor. The assumptions underlying the latter contention are that moods are a form of arousal that energize dominant responses, and that the dominant response is to shy away from the further performance of an act that one discovers to have negative consequences. Note, however, that our

general "mood activation" model is quite consistent with the premise that altruism is a form of hedonism. That is, moods function as a "general activator" that energize the performance of dominant (i.e., reinforcing) acts and inhibit the performance of nondominant (i.e., nonreinforcing) responses.

Given the nature of our mood induction, one might argue that we have really manipulated empathy rather than mood. While we are willing to concede that subjects may have experienced some empathic affect from their exposure to overheard conversations, it is not immediately obvious that a sense of empathic joy or empathic concern for a person apparently not connected with the experiment (i.e., the overheard conversationalist) should have any effect upon the subject's response to the experimenter's request for assistance. And if subjects did generalize empathic affect across targets, the fact remains that the individuals who should have experienced the most empathic affect (i.e., those who overheard pleasant or unpleasant conversations) offered less assistance than those who should have experienced little empathic affect (i.e., subjects overhearing the neutral conversation) when asked to perform a potentially unpleasant activity. Thus, even if it is plausible to argue that subjects were empathizing with the conversationalist, the experimenter, or both, such empathic affect did not facilitate helping behavior unless the task to be performed was likely to have positive consequences for the benefactor.

Although the results of this experiment support the proposition that altruism is a form of hedonism, we do not wish to imply that all helpful acts are primarily self-serving. Indeed, the media abounds with reports of people risking and occasionally losing their lives in their attempts to come to the assistance of strangers. We believe that the "Good Samaritans" in many of these incidents are well aware that the potential costs for their acts of kindness or bravery far exceed any tangible rewards they are likely

to gain. If that is the case, their helpfulness is not easily interpreted as hedonistic behavior (although it is not impossible to do so). On the other hand, the majority of opportunities that people have to assist others occur in situations like the present experiment where the needs of the prospective recipient are relatively minor (and/or not urgent), and the costs for not helping are rather low. We believe that these are precisely the circumstances under which prospective benefactors are most likely to weigh the "pros" and "cons" of helping and decide to do so (or follow through on a verbal commitment) if the anticipated outcomes of such a course of action are perceived as benefitting the self.

References

Aderman, D. Elation, depression, and helping behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1972, 24, 91-101.

Aronfreed, J. The socialization of altruistic and sympathetic behavior: Some theoretical and experimental analyses. In J. Macaulay and L. Berkowitz (Eds.), Altruism and helping behavior. New York: Academic Press, 1970.

Bateson, C. D., Coke, J., Chard, F., Smith, D., & Taliaferro, A. Generality of the "Glow of Goodwill": Effects of mood on helping and information acquisition. Social Psychology Quarterly, 1979, 42, 176-179.

Cialdini, R. B., Darby, B. L., & Vincent, J. E. Transgression and altruism: A case for hedonism. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1973, 9, 502-516.

Cialdini, R. B., & Kenrick, D. T. Altruism as hedonism: A social development perspective on the relationship of negative mood state and helping. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1976, 34, 907-914.

Isen, A. M. Success, failure, attention and reaction to others: The warm glow of success. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1970, 15, 294-301.

Isen, A. M., & Simmonds, S. F. The effect of feeling good on a helping task that is incompatible with good mood. Social Psychology Quarterly, 1978, 41, 346-349.

Velten, E. A laboratory task for the induction of mood states. Behavior Research and Therapy, 1968, 6, 473-482.

Footnotes

[1]Although the planned comparisons provide the most sensitive tests of the experimental hypotheses, the results for the overall ANOVAs are worthy of note. As one might anticipate, subjects asked to read good mood statements tended to read more statements $F(1, 66) = 3.38$, $p < .10$, and spent more time reading statements, $F(1, 66) = 4.27$, $p < .05$, than did subjects asked to read bad mood statements. Moreover, the Induced mood x Type of helping interaction was significant for the "number of statements" index $F(2, 66) = 3.36$, $p < .05$.

[2]One-tailed probabilities are reported in view of the fact that our hypotheses were directional in nature.

Table 1

Percentage of Subjects Agreeing to Help, Mean Number of Statements Read, and Mean Time Spent Reading Statements in Each Experimental Condition

		Induced Mood		
Helping measure	Type of helping	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Percentage helping	Pleasant consequences (Good mood statements)	100	91	83
	Unpleasant consequences (Bad mood statements)	83	83	91
Number of statements read	Pleasant consequences (Good mood statements)	23.03	14.17	22.83
	Unpleasant consequences (Bad mood statements)	13.75	18.08	14.33
Time spent reading (In seconds)	Pleasant consequences (Good mood statements)	111.83	61.25	107.42
	Unpleasant consequences (Bad mood statements)	66.08	86.08	63.92

Note: n = 12 per cell